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Engraved for BARNARD's New complete & Authentic HISTORY of ENGLAND.



*The Manner in which the American Colonies Declared themselves
INDEPENDANT of the King of ENGLAND,
throughout the different Provinces, on July 4, 1776.*

AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH PRINT DEPICTING, IN A THOROUGHLY IMAGINATIVE MANNER, THE FIRST READING OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Collecting The "Signers" of 1776

BY WALTER ROMEYN BENJAMIN

THE Declaration of Independence, corner-stone of American liberty, was signed by fifty-six men, delegates to the Continental Congress of 1776, sitting in Philadelphia. These, the leading men of the thirteen American Colonies, knew that by signing their names to the historic document they were placing themselves in the greatest danger, and that their only hope for survival was in union, and in stout resistance to tyranny. As Franklin said, "If we don't hang together, we shall hang separately." By the signing of this declaration these fifty-six men gained immortality. They were all, without exception, good men; no slander has ever been case on one of them. They were all men of education and standing, some in the professions and others in business; consequently they were writers of letters and signers of documents. Some of them kept books of account in their own autograph. Though Francis Hopkinson of New Jersey was a poet,

and William Ellery of Rhode Island translated Latin poems (even occupying himself with this diversion when ninety-two years of age), Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were authors of unusual ability, John Adams, Benjamin Rush and John Witherspoon likewise were writers of distinction (just as others of the Signers were distinguished in various pursuits), their chief claim to endearment in the hearts of the American nation rests on their glorious fame as the fifty-six Signers.

Collectors of the Signers,—this title of "Signers" belongs to them as a designation distinguished from that of the signers of any other public papers,—find the getting together of autographs and portraits of these sponsors of American liberty a fascinating pursuit. Nothing brings the collector more intimately in contact with the memory of a famous man than the possession of a letter or document written in whole or even just signed by him. The writing of all the signers is perfectly familiar to autographic experts, and for this reason the forger would find imitations a precarious venture. As some of the letters and even signatures of certain of the Signers are extremely rare, such efforts as have been made by forgers have turned out too poorly to deceive a collector of experience. This is fortunate, for it lends a certain security to those who seek to obtain as many of the Signers as possible.

It is hard to explain why some of the Signers are so rare. Button Gwinnett of Georgia was an active politician, a member of the General Assembly and President of the Provincial Congress, and yet only two or three letters, and perhaps two dozen other documents bearing his signature, seem to have survived. It is

Button Gwinnett

THE SIGNATURE OF BUTTON GWINNETT IS THE RAREST SIGNATURE OF THE SIGNERS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Robert R. Paine

Josiah Bartlett

William Ellery

John Adams

G. Wythe

Arthur Middleton

A REMARKABLE INSTANCE OF A GROUP OF "SIGNERS" SIGNATURES ATTACHED TO A SINGLE DOCUMENT

Caesar Rodney Esq
Grand s^r Writing
and Arithmetick carefully
Taught By James Vidar
Keep your mind to Diligence. Love God,
and your Neighbours. Keep Gods commandments
and Walk in them so long as you shall live
Turn Your Self away
From Idolatry.

Courtesy Stan V. Henkels

AUTOGRAPH PAGE WRITTEN BY CAESAR RODNEY AT
 THE AGE OF FIFTEEN

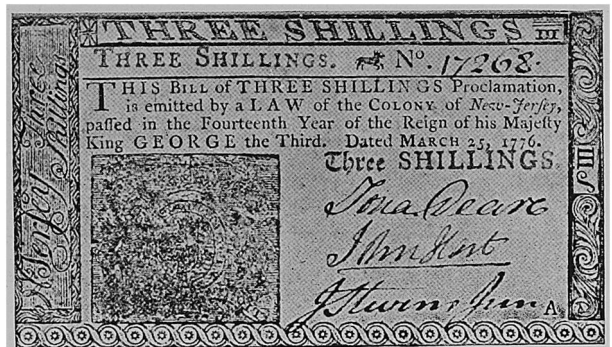
believed that this scarcity was caused in great measure by the destruction of the Colonial houses in Georgia during Sherman's march in the Civil War. These old houses undoubtedly held autographic treasures which perished at that time. Gwinnett was but forty-five years of age when he met death in a duel with General Lachlan McIntosh who, curiously, is quite common autographically, though a man of no great consequence. This was in 1777. Gwinnett had been in America but seven years.

A still rarer name is that of Thomas Lynch, Jr., of South Carolina, but this is easily accounted for, as he was only thirty years of age when he died in 1779, and most of his manhood had been passed in English educational institutions. Because of the illness of his father, Thomas Lynch, Senior, the younger man was elected to fill his place in Congress, and it happened that he signed the Declaration in that brief period.

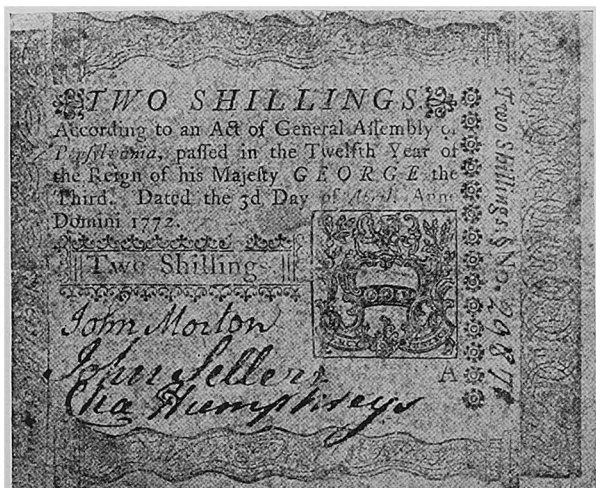
Robert R. Livingston, the famous chancellor of New York, was one of the authors of the Declaration, but was

prevented by circumstances from signing it, and not through personal antipathy to the measure, and so lost this honor, which Lynch gained through no merit of his own.

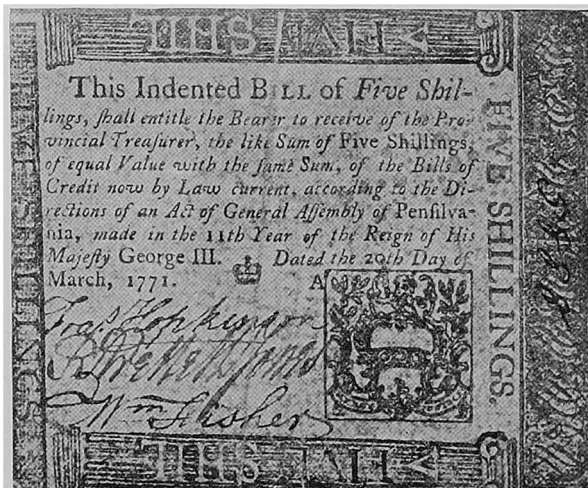
Only one thoroughly authenticated letter by Lynch is known. This is a letter which was written to George Washington urging the claims of some applicant to office. It was found among Washington's papers by Jared Sparks, the biographer, who was allowed possession of it. From him it passed to the Reverend W. B. Sprague of Albany, thence to the famous collector, the late Dr. Thomas Addis Emmet of New York. Dr. Emmet sold it to the writer who, in turn, sold it to Augustin Daly, the dramatist, from whom Dr. Emmet bought it back! When J. S. Kennedy bought Dr. Emmet's entire collection, the Lynch letter went with it, and it is now permanently in the collection of the New York Public Library, one of its treasures. Of the thirty complete sets of the Signers known, two or three have Lynch documents, but all the rest have simply a signature, in some cases the full name, though in many cases only "Lynch." These signatures were found on the fly leaves of books owned by the young man. Many years ago a descendent of the Lynch family brought four books containing five signatures to New York, and one turned up about five years ago in Tennessee. Others were discoveries of Lyman C. Draper, the Western historian. Another South Carolina Signer, Thomas Heyward, Jr., is common in documents signed and ex-



COLONIAL THREE SHILLING NOTE BEARING THE AUTOGRAPH OF JOHN HART, ONE OF THE "SIGNERS"



COLONIAL TWO SHILLING NOTE BEARING THE SIGNATURE OF JOHN MORTON, ONE OF THE "SIGNERS"



COLONIAL FIVE SHILLING NOTE BEARING THE SIGNATURE OF FRANCIS HOPKINSON

tremely rare in any other form. The rarity of the Signers has varied greatly, except in the cases of Lynch and Gwinnett. John Morton of Pennsylvania, was at one time rated as perhaps the third rarest Signer. Today his autographs are fairly common.

Arthur Middleton of South Carolina,

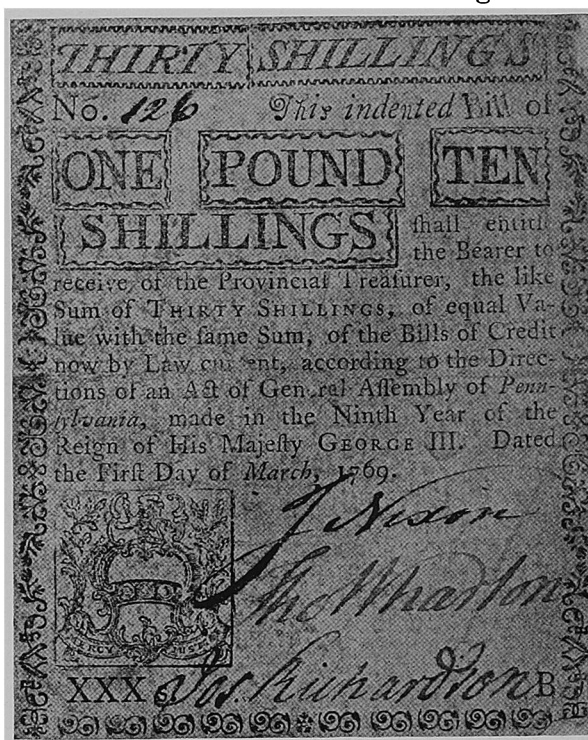
was fairly common thirty years ago and is now very rare. The matter of rarity in Signers' autographs all depends on the extent of new discoveries and on the disappearance of some of the documents already known, either by absorption in public collections, or otherwise. Moreover no one knows what treasures of old letters may still be extant. Elliot Danforth, formerly Lieutenant-Governor of New York, amused himself by travelling about the United States, unearthing great bundles of old papers, generally in neglected public archives. Some have blamed him for appropriating these papers, but he probably thus saved them from the fire or from the paper mill as the public negligence and indifference in respect to public archives is too well known to need elaborate comment.

Passing through the list alphabetically, other rare names among the Signers are, (at the present time), as follows: in letters; Samuel Adams, Carter Braxton, Abraham Clark, Lyman Hall, William

Floyd, Joseph Hewes, William Hooper, Francis Lewis, Philip Livingston, Lewis Morris, William Paca, John Penn, James Smith, Richard Stockton, Thomas Stone, George Taylor, John Witherspoon, Oliver Wolcott and George Wythe. Some of

these men are not at all rare in documents signed.

Thomas Lynch Junr



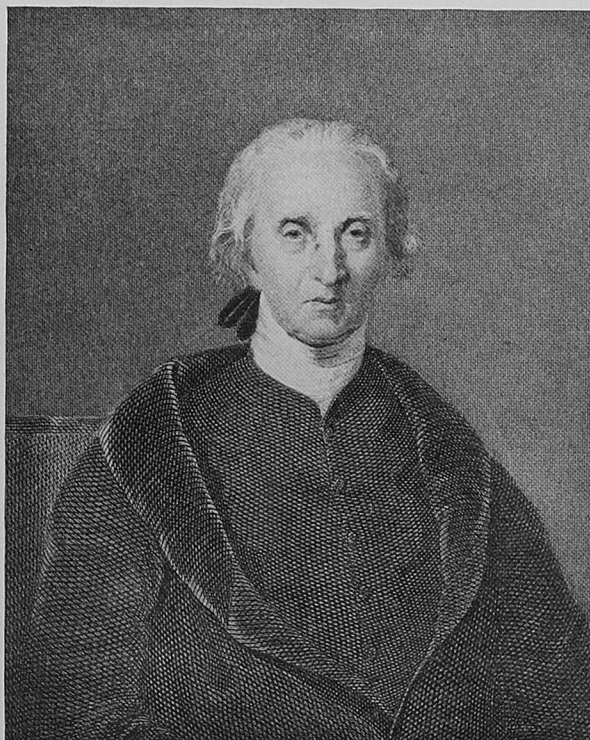
COLONIAL ONE POUND TEN SHILLINGS NOTE BEARING THE SIGNATURE OF JOHN NIXON, WHO FIRST READ THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE TO THE PUBLIC FROM INDEPENDENCE HALL, PHILADELPHIA

The collecting of a complete set of Signers has always been a prime object with American collectors, and yet only thirty sets are known. The trouble has been the lack of Lynch and Gwinnett material, whose place must, until chance upturns letters by them, be taken by facsimiles. There is a fair hope of obtaining all the other names.

Sets of Signers vary in value. An ideal set would consist entirely of letters, or documents with contents of historical interest,

documents written during the year of signing, 1776. A very fine set would consist of letters (Lynch and Gwinnett of necessity excepted), written during the Revolution. Some sets of the Signers are of letters, documents and signatures mixed. Others consist of documents only, and a few of signatures only. To complete a set, a collector will often be willing to pay much more for an example of a desired specimen than its usual market value.

Mr. James H. Manning of Albany, who has a complete set of the Signers, has busied himself in trying to keep track of other complete sets; from him the following list of sets of the Signers has been obtained: the Boston Public Library one set of Sig-

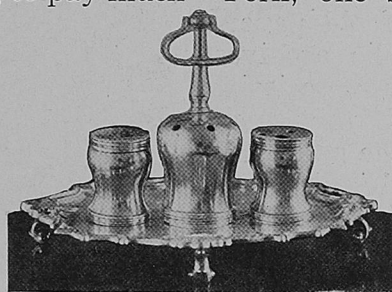


PORTRAIT OF CHARLES CARROLL OF CARROLLTON (1737-1882), WHO OUTLIVED ALL THE OTHER SIGNERS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

Charles Carroll of Carrollton

Ch Carroll of Carrollton

AN EARLY SIGNATURE OF CHARLES CARROLL OF CARROLLTON AND ONE WRITTEN IN 1829



TRAY, QUILL-HOLDER, INK POT AND SAND-SHAKER USED BY THE SIGNERS OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. THIS SET WAS MADE BY PHILIP SYNG, THE YOUNGER, IN 1752 FOR THE PHILADELPHIA ASSEMBLY, AND BEARS THE MAKER'S MARK, P. S. (IN SHIELD) WITH LEAF

natures only; Carpenters' Hall, Philadelphia, one set of Signatures only; Congressional Library, Washington, one set (the Original Declaration of Independence Document); the City of Denver, one set; Mr. James W. Ellsworth of New York, one set; Mr. Simon Gratz, of Philadelphia, two sets; Haverford College, Pennsylvania, one set; Mr. Z. T. Hollingsworth of Boston, one set; the Maine Historical Society of Portland, one set; Mr.

Henry Malkan of New York, one set; Mr. James H. Manning of Albany, one set; Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan of New York, two sets; the New York State Library, Albany, one set; the New York Public Library, four sets; the Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia, two sets; Mr. Herbert L. Pratt of Brooklyn, New York, one set; Mr. Thomas R. Proctor of Utica, New York, one set; the Southport Free Library, Southport, Connecticut, one set; the Wisconsin State Historical Society, one set; Mr. Roderick Terry of Newport, Rhode Island, one set; Mrs. John Boyd Thacher of Albany, New York, one set and the set formerly owned by the late George C. Thomas of Philadelphia.